

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 AID-20 AGR-20 OMB-01 EB-11 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 SIL-01

LAB-06 CU-04 IO-14 FEA-02 COME-00 TRSE-00 INT-08 /177 W

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R 250931Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1782

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

CINCPAC

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB

SUBJ: LABOR - NEW DIRECTIONS

REF : BANGKOK 4737

1. SUMMARY. VARIOUS ELEMENTS CONCERNED WITH THAI LABOR ARE TAKING OR PLANNING NEW INITIATIVES. INCIDENCE OF STRIKES IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY FELL OFF SHARPLY FROM DECEMBER, BUT AGAIN ON UPWARD TREND AND EXPECTED TO INCREASE FURTHER IN APRIL UNDER MOUNTING INFLATIONARY PRESSURE. WITH MEMBERSHIP ERODING, LEADERS OF ORGANIZED LABOR ACTING MORE MILITANTLY IN APPARENT EFFORT TO RETAIN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS. MANAGEMENT TOO SEEMS TO BE TAKING HARDER LINE. OUTSIDE POLITICAL INFLUENCES ARE ALSO FRAGMENTING LABOR MOVEMENT WHILE LABOR DEPARTMENT ITSELF APPEARS TO BE GOING THROUGH LEADERSHIP DIFFICULTIES. GREATLY INCREASED ACTIVITY EXPECTED IN VERY NEAR FUTURE IN WORKER EDUCATION FIELD AS CHULALONGKORN AND THAMMASAT UNIVERSITIES, AAFLA AND ICFTU PROMOTE VARIOUS PROGRAMS.

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2. THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF SIGNS RECENTLY THAT

VARIOUS ELEMENTS IN THE THAI LABOR PICTURE ARE TAKING OR PLANNING NEW INITIATIVES. THE HUNDREDS OF STRIKES IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER LAST YEAR, WHICH POSED THE MOST SERIOUS POTENTIAL THREAT TO SANYA GOVERNMENT UP TO THAT TIME, DECLINED TO 34 IN JANUARY AND TO ONLY 14 IN FEBRUARY. HOWEVER, THERE HAS ALREADY BEEN SOME INCREASE IN MARCH, INCLUDING WORK STOPPAGES AT NEW DOLE CANNING FACTORY IN HUA HIN, AND BY 500 GUARDS AT AIR BASES IN THE NORTHEAST (DUE TO SINCE-RESOLVED MISUNDERSTANDING RE PROVIDENT FUND). NATIONWIDE FISHING STRIKE, ALTHOUGH APPARENTLY NOT OBSERVED EVERYWHERE, IS PRIMARILY OVER ISSUE OF FUEL COSTS AND MAY TRIGGER NEW WAVE OF LABOR UNREST IN RESPONSE TO CONTINUING INFLATIONARY PRESSURES. INDEED, BOTH RTG LABOR DEPT. AND LEADERS OF ORGANIZED LABOR HAVE INFORMED EMBASSY OFFICER RECENTLY THAT THEY EXPECT NEW STRIKE WAVE IN APRIL.

3. BANGKOK CPI ROSE ALMOST 4 PERCENT BETWEEN DECEMBER AND JANUARY AND SHARP BUT PROGRESSIVE INCREASES RECENTLY ANNOUNCED FOR HOUSEHOLD ELECTRICITY; HIGHER BUS FARES ALSO EXPECTED SOON IN RESPONSE TO INCREASED OIL PRICES. INDEED, FISHERMEN'S STRIKE ITSELF CAUSING AT LEAST TEMPORARY PRICE INCREASES FOR MEAT AND OTHER PROTEIN SOURCES.

4. QUEUES FOR RICE AT CONTROLLED PRICES IN RECENT WEEKS HAVE ADDED TO UNREST. AT ONE POINT NORMALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERS OF WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS REPORTEDLY MADE UNPRECEDENTED THREAT TO BURN DOWN WAREHOUSE WHERE RTG-OWNED CHEAP RICE STORED UNLESS COMMERCE MINISTRY RELEASED IT TO THEIR MEMBERS (WHICH WAS DONE) AT FIXED PRICES. MISHANDLING OF RICE SALES LAST SUMMER WAS IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO STRIKES THAT HELPED BRING ON THANOM REGIME'S DOWNFALL, AND WORKERS SEEM CONVINCED THAT, SOMEHOW, PRESENT RTG RICE SALES INDICATE SHORTAGE OF THAT VITAL COMMODITY (EASING OF THIS PROBLEM REPORTED IN REFTTEL.

5. GREATER MILITANCY ON PART OF LABOR LEADERS APPEARS TO REFLECT FRUSTRATION AT THEIR INABILITY TO PROFIT ORGANIZATIONALLY, DESPITE INCREASED IMPORTANCE OF LABOR AS A GROUP, DURING 1973 STRIKE WAVE. LEADERS TRIED, WITH LITTLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUCCESS, TO PRESENT THEMSELVES TO BOTH WORKERS AND MANAGEMENT AS RESPONSIBLE WORKER REPS WHO COULD OBTAIN CONCESSIONS FOR FORMER AND CONTROL WORK FORCE FOR LATTER. SINCE BEGINNING OF YEAR, MEMBERSHIP IN LOCAL WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS HAS DROPPED OFF SIGNIFICANTLY, AND LEADERS MAY NOW FEEL UNDER PRESSURE TO BE IN FOREFRONT OF ANY FUTURE CONFRONTATIONS WITH MANAGEMENT. OBSERVANCE OF LABOR DAY ON MAY 1 SHOULD PROVIDE FURTHER INSIGHT INTO STATE OF LABOR MILITANCY AND

CONCERNS. EMPLOYERS FOR THEIR PART SEEM INCLINED TO TAKE MUCH TOUGHER POSITION THAN LAST YEAR IF TEST OF STRENGTH WITH LABOR OCCURS. THIS NEW ATTITUDE APPEARS BASED ON THEIR VIEW THAT THEY MADE SUBSTANTIAL CONCESSIONS TO WORKERS DURING 1973 STRIKES, AGREEMENTS WHICH RESULTED THEN ARE STILL VALID FOR BOTH PARTIES, AND OTHER PROBLEMS (E.G., RAW MATERIAL SHORTAGES, FUEL, SHIPPING) MAKE THEM MORE WILLING TO COSE DOWN THEIR PLANTS IF NECESSARY IN A TEST OF STRENGTH WITH LABOR.

6. THERE IS MORE FRAGMENTATION IN THAI LABOR MOVEMENT AS PRESSURE INCREASES ON IT FROM OUTSIDE INFLUENCES. FEW DAYS AGO SUVITYA RAVIWONG, WHO HAS BEEN REGULARLY CHOSEN AS WORKERS' REPRESENTATIVE TO ANNUAL GENEVA IL MEETING, SECURED ONLY NINE OF 32 VOTES CAST BY WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS' PRESIDENTS FOR THIS YEAR'S POSITION AS REP. HOWEVER, HE STILL WAS SELECTED, AS NEXT HIGHEST VOTE-GETTER RECEIVED ONLY SEVEN AND OTHER VOTES WERE WIDELY SCATTERED. VARIOUS "LABOR CENTERS" HAVE ALSO BEEN ESTABLISHED OR EXPANDED IN RECENT MONTHS WHICH APPEAR TO BE FRONTS FOR POLITICAL GROUPS PREPARING FOR PLANNED NATIONAL ELECTIONS. EFFECT IS, HOWEVER, TO FRACTURE MOVEMENT EVEN FURTHER.

7. RTG LABOR DEPT. ITSELF SEEMS TO BE FACING LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS AS PRESENT DIR.GEN., NIKOM CHANDARAITOON, NOW SPENDING MUCH OF HIS TIME AT NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WHERE DRAFT CONSTITUTION BEING DEBATED THREE DAYS A WEEK. DAY-TO-DAY RUNNING OF DEPARTMENT IS LEFT TO HIS DEPUTY, PORN UDOMPONG. MUCH-NEEDED SECOND DEPUTY POSITION REMAINS UNFILLED, THOUGH CAPABLE VICHIT SANGTONG NOW GIVEN INSIDE TRACK FOR JOB. VARIOUS SOURCES INDICATE NIKOM EXPECTED SOON TO RESIGN AS DIR.GEN., PRESUMABLY TO RUN FOR NLA IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS PLANNED FOR SUMMER OR AUTUMN.

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8. IN THIS SETTING VARIOUS ORGANIZATIONS ARE PLANNING TO EXPAND LOCAL WORKER EDUCATION PROGRAMS. AAFLI WILL INITIATE PROJECT HERE IN APRIL, WORKING THROUGH CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY AND WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS. THAMMASAT UNIVERSITY GEARING UP ITS OWN PROGRAM, WHICH REALLY AMOUNTS TO ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORKERS AND IS NOT AIMED AT UNION ORGANIZATION. LABOR DEPARTMENT ITSELF SEEMS TO BE TURNING ITS BACK ON WORKERS' ASSOCIATIONS AND REDIRECTING ITS EFFORTS TOWARD TEACHING "GOOD CITIZENSHIP" TO UNORGANIZED WORKERS. ICFTU ALSO PLANNING TO STEP UP ITS ACTIVITIES IN THAILAND.  
KINTNER

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## Message Attributes

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